

# House Select Committee on Homeland Security **Democrats**

**JIM TURNER, Ranking Member**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **TURNER DEMANDS THAT TERRORIST WATCH LIST GET DONE**

A letter from the FBI received by Congressman Jim Turner, Ranking Member of the House Select Committee on Homeland Security, reveals that the Terrorist Screening Center (TSC) is not fully operational, and that a unified terrorist watch list still does not exist.

The letter, from Eleni Kalisch, Assistant Director of Congressional Affairs at the FBI, came in response to a formal inquiry made by Democrats on the Committee in November of last year.

**“It is unacceptable that more than two years after September 11, we still don’t have a comprehensive unified terrorist watch list that is a robust tool for the people on front lines protecting this country. The Bush Administration has failed to exercise leadership on this issue. The Homeland Security Committee needs to hold hearings with Director Mueller and demand solutions now.”** said Turner.

**“They promised that the watch list problem would be fixed by December 1. Now, they say it is in a “test phase” and has only “limited capabilities.” The simple fact is that the job is far from done. We will continue to hold the Administration accountable on this critical issue.”**

The November 26, 2003 letter sent by Turner and his colleagues outlined 10 specific requirements for the Terrorist Screening Center to be considered “fully operational” by its December 1, 2003 opening date and requested the FBI to identify timelines for achieving these milestones. A notice from the TSC to first responders on November 28 indicated that the TSC would have “limited capability,” and the FBI letter states that the Center is still “in the test phase of the consolidated database application,” indicating that requirements set forth by Homeland Security Presidential Directive 6 were not fulfilled.

**“The FBI has said the Terrorist Screening Center is operational, but without a comprehensive unified watch list, its effectiveness is limited and its promise to the American people is not fulfilled.”**

Turner cited significant shortcomings of the TSC’s development thus far, learned from the FBI letter and Administration briefings.

- Less than 20% of the records – from only a few of the existing watch lists – have been integrated into the TSC system. Therefore, routine criminal background checks by federal, state, and local law enforcement miss too many of the individuals the government suspects of terrorist involvement.

- As of mid-December, only 28 people (including contractors and detailees) were staffing the TSC, despite TSC representatives' indications that they need more personnel to carry out their mission.
- Despite the Administration's announcement in September 2003 that the TSC would "consolidate terrorist watchlists," the TSC is still not in a position to create a comprehensive integrated database. Basic information sharing and data use issues remain unresolved between the TSC and the other federal agencies that own the 12 separate watch lists.
- Other federal agencies are not yet working with the TSC as intended. The TSC was not used to run checks against passenger lists on Air France and other airlines that led to cancelled and delayed flights.

**"The hard-working men and women of the TSC deserve our thanks, but the senior Administration officials need to make this a priority.**

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